NETWORK A MEETING RECORD

Network A Plenary Meeting
March 15-16, 2001, Brussels, Belgium

Participants

Christiane Blondin, Belgium (Fr.)
Luc Van de Poele, Belgium (Fl.)
Jerry Mussio, Canada
Jana Straková, Czech Republic
Jørn Skovsgaard, Denmark
Pirjo Linnakylä, Finland
Jacqueline Levasseur, France
Jochen Schweitzer, Germany
Benedek Péter Tóta, Hungary
Gerry Shiel, Ireland
Chiara Croce, Italy
Jean-Paul Reeff, Luxembourg
Jules Peschar, Netherlands
Arnold Spee, Netherlands
Eva Schøyen, Norway
Glória Ramalho, Portugal
Guillermo Gil, Spain
Anita Wester, Sweden
Erich Ramseier, Switzerland
Lorna Bertrand, United Kingdom
Andreas Schleicher, OECD Secretariat
Jay Moskowitz, Network A Secretariat
Maria Stephens, Network A Secretariat
Rich Tobin, Network A Secretariat

Presenters and Observers

Sevki Karaça, Turkey
Ryo Watanabe, Japan
Hans Pelgrum, University of Twente
Dominique Rychen, Swiss Federal
    Statistical Office (DeSeCo)
Richard Venezky, University of Delaware

Regrets

Wendy Whitham, Australia
Friedrich Plank, Austria
Gella Varnava-Skoura, Greece
Kooghyang Ro, Korea
Fernando Cordova, Mexico
Lynne Whitney, New Zealand
Eugene Owen, United States

Summary of Major Outcomes

- The Network A Secretariat will re-draft the proposal for EAG to include a three-year plan for indicators. The proposal will focus on PISA for the first year and will explore ways to track the PISA thematic reports and include information from IEA studies such as CivEd and PIRLS in subsequent years.

- The strategy paper will be revised to focus on 2003 only. The Planning Committee also will continue to think about the long-term strategy for PISA. The Committee's efforts in this regard will be informed by a meeting of the Network A and C Chairs in April and by a survey of members, drafted and distributed by the Secretariat, on what information they want to get out of PISA and how it might evolve. The survey will be distributed in April/May.

- The Network is supportive of proceeding with development work in the area of ICT. Members will recommend experts to the Secretariat, and the Network will continue conversations about commissioning a map of the field.

- Regarding the Network A 2000 chapters, the Secretariat will work with the OECD to explore: (1) commercial publishing; (2) publishing by one or more member government agencies; and (3) publishing on the Internet. Letters will be sent to members to seek financial support for this endeavor, along with a list of the chapters that have been prepared.

Welcome and Introduction

Jay Moskowitz opened the Network A meeting and offered regrets for Eugene Owen, who was unable to attend the meeting. He then welcomed new members Jørn Skovsgaard from Denmark and Anita Wester from Sweden, as well as BPC observers to the meeting, Ryo Watanabe from Japan and Sevki Karaca from Turkey. Members reviewed the agenda, and Pirjo Linnakylä requested adding an update on the option for reading in a foreign language during the scheduled discussion on PISA. They also approved the minutes, with no changes.

Finally, Christiane Blondin and Dominique Barthelemy, from the Ministry of Education of the French community of Belgium, each offered an official welcome to members.

Updates from the OECD

Andreas Schleicher provided updates on the status and progress of various OECD activities. He drew parallels between the development of processes in Networks B and C and the history of Network A—suggesting that they are following similar paths, looking first at national sources of information and then conducting development work to fill holes in existing data.

- **Network B**'s main activity is developing a module on adult participation in continuing education and training (CET). The module is intended to supplement, and thus harmonize, existing national surveys of the adult population.

- **Network C**'s main activity is the survey of upper secondary schools, which will be field tested in the Spring of 2001. Network C also is working on developing a long-term strategy for collecting information on education quality, specifically better information on teachers and teaching.

- Regarding increasing **collaboration** between OECD and other international organizations, Andreas noted that UNESCO, Eurostat, and OECD have developed a protocol for the collection of statistics and plan to work together on analysis. He also described a paper, drafted by Canadian representatives, on ways to coordinate various INES activities in school survey work.

- Plans are underway for individualized **country profile reports** that would compile and present a set of key indicators. This is a response to countries' requests for more targeted, useful, and cohesive sets of indicators that might begin to suggest some explanations for achievement. [These reports would be described in more detail later in the meeting.]

- Finally, there was a recent meeting on **PISA-L** (the longitudinal option), which 18 countries attended. Countries asked for more information about how information from PISA-L could be linked to other sources of information.

Then, there was a brief period for Q&A. In responding to several questions on PISA-L, Andreas explained the connections with Network B—their transitions sub-group had a voice in the development process, concluding that nothing further could be done using only national surveys—and noted that all key stakeholders (including both education and labor) would be approached at the country level for financial support. Andreas also noted that a revised version of the Canadian paper would be available on April 15th, following the April 2-3 Ministerial meeting.

Discussion on EAG Indicators 2001 and 2002

The Network then turned to a discussion on EAG 2001 and EAG 2002.

EAG 2001

Andreas called members' attention to the outline for this year's edition of EAG, which was in the briefing book, and noted that the publication would be released on June 6, 2001. He described the overall trends in this year's publication: 1) an interest in trying to provide a good picture of OECD countries with a limited number of indicators; 2) an attempt to orient the publication towards outcomes across the various issue areas; and 3) an increased emphasis on change and variation. Focusing specifically on the chapter contributed by Network A, Andreas noted only a few changes by OECD since the Network's review in December, including an expansion of the introduction, insertion of margin notes, and addition of a new indicator on adult literacy and income. Jay then opened the floor for comments.

Most of the conversation centered around whether or not an additional chart, relating change in achievement and change in standard deviation, should or could be added to Indicator F2. Arnold Spee strongly supported such a chart and was disappointed that it had not been included previously. Other members supported the idea, although a few had concerns about the technical validity of the regression analysis. Andreas also thought that it would not pass a stability analysis, but agreed that more scatter-plot type charts could be included in the future. He noted, however, that it was too late in the timeline to make a change of this magnitude.

Another major topic of discussion was Indicator F3 on literacy inequality and income inequality. Pirjo was pleased to have the addition, but suggested that the wording be focused on equality rather than inequality, a position which was supported by Jerry Mussio. Jerry, however, was less pleased with the indicator and expressed concern about the public's understanding of it. Chiara Croce asked that the indicator include explanatory footnotes, as do the other indicators, and Gerry Shiel requested the addition of background information on IALS, such as is found in the other indicators for TIMSS.

Two other comments of note: Luc van de Poele raised the issue about what might be done in situations where there are complicating reasons why a difference may be found statistically significant or insignificant, such as the case in the Flemish Community of Belgium, where large

standard errors are probably the reason that relatively large gender differences were not determined to be statistically significant. Other members requested that analysis of the progress between 7th and 8th grade be left out of indicators F1 and F2, along with terminology on "educational significance."

EAG 2002

Maria Stephens then gave an overview of the proposal for indicators for EAG 2002. She noted that the proposal focuses on data from two sources—PISA and the IEA Civic Education Study (CivEd)—because these are the newest data available; they cover subject areas that have not recently been addressed in EAG; and they include the greatest range and number of OECD countries. She also described a central issue for members to consider in providing guidance for this year's indicators: given the high potential overlap of EAG and the PISA reports, what approach would the Network like to take? She offered three possibilities: (1) to focus on and reiterate key findings from the initial report; (2) to focus on key findings in a thematic presentation (e.g., gender); or (3) to dig deeper into the data, gaining access to the data and conducting more complicated analyses on selected topics.

The Network then had an interesting discussion, weighing the pros and cons of the three approaches. Guillermo shared the first comment, suggesting that, given the issues raised in the proposal, the Network really needed a longer-term plan for approaching the indicators. This idea received strong support.

Most members supported the first option to focus on key results. They did not view such an approach to be redundant, rather complementary, and they thought it would be politically unwise not to utilize the data that the Network and policy makers had been waiting for for so long. Also, they thought such "overview" type indicators fit well with the nature of EAG. Following the first approach, Guillermo suggested a focus on proficiency levels, rather than means, and the relationship of achievement and SES; Arnold suggested that EAG might usefully preview the thematic reports in its selection of indicators each year. Gerry was concerned about the potential loss of information on mathematics and science, should a focus on reading literacy be chosen for EAG. A few other members thought the second or third approaches would be more interesting, but could see the reasoning for selecting the first and could support it, especially if the focus were on proficiency levels. Erich Ramseier suggested that the third approach was better suited to a proposal for a thematic report.

Regarding possible CivEd indicators, opinion was split. Some members were very interested in including CivEd in this year's edition (having waited through several delays already) along with more information about attitudes; whereas others had concerns about the quality and usefulness of the data in an indicator-style report. On a related note, Pirjo expressed a desire that IEA studies not be marginalized and suggested that the Network should think about what role they might play in current and future EAGs.

Summarizing consensus, Jay suggested that the Network A Secretariat should re-draft the proposal for EAG to include a three-year plan for indicators. The proposal will focus on PISA for the first year and will explore ways to track the PISA thematic reports and include information from IEA studies such as CivEd and PIRLS in subsequent years.

Presentation on DeSeCo

The Network then welcomed Dominique Rychen from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office to give a presentation on the progress of the DeSeCo project. She gave a brief review of the history of the DeSeCo project, which aims to identify key competencies across OECD countries, and the findings from the first international symposiums and expert papers. She noted several factors affecting views on key competencies, including: differing theoretical models, cultural and biological variation, political negotiation, and visions of societies and individuals. From the first phases of the project, three key competencies seem to be emerging: acting autonomously and reflectively; using tools interactively; and joining and functioning in socially heterogeneous groups.

The current phase of the project is the Country Commenting Process (CCP). The purpose of the CCP is to obtain information on national efforts to identify core competencies, national views on what key competencies are and how they are embedded in skills development, and national views on the DeSeCo project and the potential of assessing key competencies. Thirteen countries are participating in the CCP: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. Participants have the option of conducting a workshop or preparing a written statement. From the two countries reporting so far (Switzerland and the U.S.), there appears to be convergence with the preliminary findings. Both countries also offered cautionary notes in their comments, noting that the idea of key competencies is highly sensitive, subject to intracultural variations which may limit cross-country validity, and, while desirable, perhaps not feasible.

In the next six months, project coordinators will be commissioning a sixth paper, adding the perspective of educational research, and will be planning for the 2nd international symposium. The symposium will have open attendance and will occur in February 2002. The goal is to be able to make recommendations for assessment strategies for key competencies at that time.   The DeSeCo project will be publishing a book on its early findings and activities in June 2001.

Of note, during the commenting period following the presentation, Erich Ramseier suggested that the results of DeSeCo may be very useful for the Network's possible development work in ICT.

Report from the Planning Committee Discussion on the Long-Term Strategy

The next item on the agenda was a report from the Planning Committee on their meetings in Los Angeles and the previous evening. Jerry Mussio made a few introductory remarks and then turned the floor to Rich Tobin, who gave an overview of the paper "Strategy for Identifying Policy-Relevant Themes for PISA" and changes already suggested by the committee in their review the previous evening.

Rich described how the committee had emerged from the Los Angeles meeting preferring a strategy for making decisions about analytic themes for PISA over a strict analysis plan, as had been the original goal of the meeting.   In their review the previous evening, the committee had suggested that the strategy, as currently written, was too narrow and did not allow well enough

for the inclusion of potentially explanatory information or for the flexibility of PISA over time. At the same time, committee members were concerned about over-burdening PISA as the sole source of all the information they were interested in. Rich also reported that the committee had suggested that the essential criteria be expanded to include comparability, that the desirable criteria be eliminated, that the term "policy relevance" be clarified, and that the language of the paper be toned down to be less prescriptive.

Jay then provided some information on the second paper (Lynne Whitney's) included in the briefing book. He noted that the paper, using a model from business, was a useful attempt to describe roles and responsibilities for decision-making among the different PISA players. Jay then opened the floor for discussion.

The discussion in the Network was very similar to that in the Planning Committee, with members generally expressing a desire for the strategy paper to be more flexible in terms of the long-term strategy, the types of information that might be collected, and the tools with which it would be collected. They also strongly supported the addition of the comparability (or cross-national validity/relevance) criteria.

Summarizing, Jay suggested that the strategy paper should be re-tooled to be more strategic (and less proscriptive) and focus only on 2003. The revised strategy paper would be reviewed by the BPC at their meeting in April and would then be used to guide decision-making about the questionnaires and a detailed analysis plan for 2003. The paper also would be used as a starting point for developing a longer-term strategy, informed not only by the previous discussion, but also by the upcoming meeting between the Networks A and C chairs and staffs and information from countries. Regarding the latter, Jay suggested that the Network A Secretariat draft a brief questionnaire for countries' input on "how we see PISA evolving over the next 10 years." Tying the discussion together, Lynne's paper could then be used to help assign roles and responsibilities in the long-term strategy. The Network agreed with this plan of action.

Update on PISA

The second day of the meeting began with an overview from Andreas on PISA. First, however, he elaborated on the proposed country profile reports.

Country Profile Reports

The purpose of the reports is to "bring the indicators together." The challenges in developing the reports, Andreas said, are: (1) to determine a set of indicators that are most relevant; (2) to set meaningful benchmarks (e.g., is the point of comparison the OECD mean, high-performing countries, countries of interest to the feature country?); and (3) to communicate findings. He noted that discussions are underway about finding the appropriate balance between national and international (e.g., there might be 10 common indicators and 5 indicators of national interest) and getting the right balance between performance and progress. Members seemed pleased by the presentation and plans for the reports. Jay asked about the level of narrative—Andreas said it would be mostly descriptive, with interpretation being a role for the countries—and Gerry asked where the reports fit in the grand scheme of OECD indicator publications—Andreas said that

they are not intended to replace EAG in the short run and are being developed for further consideration at the next General Assembly.

PISA 2000

Then, Andreas described progress in PISA 2000:

- Countries have their national datasets, and data adjudication has been completed with nearly all countries meeting standards for inclusion.

- There will be an extended hands-on workshop at the end of April/early May in Austria on national dissemination. Sixteen countries will participate.

- The BPC meeting in April will focus on coming to consensus on the outline for the initial report, about which members have wide ranging views. At the BPC meeting in July, members will review a draft of the initial report.

- There is a working outline for the initial report, which includes 5 chapters: (1) introduction; (2) outcomes (cognitive and non-cognitive); (3) bivariate comparisons (e.g., SES, learning environment); (4) indications for policy; and (5) summary.

- Finally, a proposal for an additional thematic report (on CCC/Self-Regulated Learning) has been submitted and will be reviewed by the BPC in April.

PISA 2003

Finally, Andreas reported on the progress of the second cycle of PISA, now underway:

- The main task for the contractor is the development/expansion of the mathematics framework.

- Another big task is the development of a conceptual framework for the context questionnaires.

- There is a proposal for an option to assess reading in a foreign language. The issues to consider are: (1) the assessment would not gauge the full range of proficiency, missing the high end of the distribution; (2) differing percentages of the population would take the test across countries, perhaps creating issues for reporting results; and (3) a screening mechanism is suggested to ensure a minimum level of proficiency. Many countries were very interested in and supportive of the option but were concerned about some of the issues and had questions about options for multiple languages or languages other than English.

- There will be a proposal from Germany at the April BPC meeting for a teacher questionnaire, in which 12 countries have expressed interest.

ICT Presentations and Future Development Work

To inform their discussions about possible future development work in ICT, the Network heard two presentations from experts in the field. [Only brief summaries are presented below. For more information, please see the background papers in the briefing book.]

Hans Pelgrum

Hans Pelgrum from the University of Twente and the project director for SITES gave the first presentation. He opened with a review of some of the existing work in ICT indicators and assessment, including the IEA's Computers in Education Study and the various modules of the SITES project. Although he said there was great interest in the topic, he noted a great dearth of comparative information. As issues to consider, he described the role of assessment in the policy cycle and the changing roles of students and teachers. He urged a somewhat cautious approach to development, suggesting that the Network look first to broad, descriptive indicators (such as infrastructure, opportunity for student-centered learning) and use first national and then international options to explore more innovative indicators.

Richard Venezky

Richard Venezky from the University of Delaware and OECD then gave a presentation that described some of the particular approaches that have previously been taken in the assessment of ICT. He suggested a three-fold categorization for previous (and possible future) attempts to measure ICT skills: literacy (what do students know about computers); applications (can students use and navigate computers); and concepts (can students understand how technology works). Options for assessment include performance assessment, short answer, and concept probes (or questionnaires). He noted an important but sometimes difficult distinction between ICT and information handling. He suggested that the Network focus on concepts because a focus only on applications would be inconsistent with the mission of PISA and would be easily outdated.

Future Development Work

The Network then had a lengthy and lively discussion. Most members seemed skeptical of the lasting importance of indicators that would focus only on infrastructure or concepts. Jean-Paul Reeff suggested a less vocational and more general approach to conceptual groundwork in this area, an idea which was supported by other members. Luc noted that one distinction is when ICT is thought of as a facilitator, rather than an outcome—preferring to use development work to build an assessment that would answer questions like, "how is learning with ICT done? Other members asked questions, and were interested in, how performance assessment in ICT is conducted. The experts countered with warnings about logistical issues associated with performance assessment and a skepticism about the pace of change members seemed to anticipate by 2006.

Following a lunch break, Jay called for a roundtable to assess members' interest in continuing with development work in the area of ICT, given their preferences to go in different directions

than had been suggested in the morning session. All members were supportive of continuing to think about development work for an assessment of ICT. A summary of the comments follows:

- It is clear that the Network needs to provide strict guidance to experts it would employ in the development process. Thus, there should be more conversation at the Network level about this area.

- There is an interest, among some members, for exploring ICT from the information-handling perspective.

- There is an interest ensuring that the "C" in ICT is not forgotten in any development work.

- There is an interest, among some members, in finding ways to link the ICT assessment to the science assessment, the major domain in 2006.

- The focus should remain broad (including out of school learning) and should not be redundant with existing initiatives.

Jay thanked the members for their comment and suggested that what might be needed is a map of the domain, which members can use to develop guidance for continued development work. He asked members to submit any possible expert names to the Secretariat. A listserv/discussion group will be explored for further discussion among members about this topic.

Other Business

As a final point of business, Jay asked members to engage in a discussion on possibilities for publishing the chapters which had been prepared for Network A 2000, since they were not published by the OECD as anticipated. Jay suggested one option was for the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics to publish the papers as a Working Paper, with financial assistance from volunteer members. Some members were worried that without co-sponsorship, the papers would lose their international perspective. Others were reluctant to contribute to a project to which they had already contributed (through the preparation or sponsorship of chapters) and been disappointed. Andreas suggested that the documents could be published on OECD's website. Some members wanted to know about the chance of having the papers published by a commercial firm. In order of preference, the Network decided to:

- Ask OECD's assistance in seeking a commercial publisher;

- Have the Secretariat inquire about possibilities for other government agencies to publish the papers, alone or with NCES; and

- Publish the chapters on the OECD web-site (which would be precluded if published commercially).

Although the issue of financing remains open, these inquiries will be made and the outcomes will be communicated to the members. A letter also will be sent to members, seeking financial support and providing the complete list of chapters to be included.

Network A Closing and Next Meeting

In conclusion, Jay reviewed the major decisions taken at the meeting (a summary of which can be found at the beginning of this document). It was decided that the next Network A meeting will be held on October 25-26, to precede the BPC meeting on October 29-30. The location is to be determined.

Jay thanked Christiane for her hospitality and warm welcome in Brussels; Dominique Rychen, Jerry Mussio, Rich Tobin, Hans Pelgrum, and Dick Venezky for their presentations; and the members for their hard work and participation, as always. The meeting was adjourned.